

The Girl In The Window

The Story Of The Millicent Library

By
Mabel Hoyle Knipe



*The Girl
In The
Window*

— The Story of the Millicent Library —

Dedicated

January 30, 1893

Material Researched and Integrated

By

Mabel Hoyle Knipe

Fairhaven, Massachusetts

June 1979

DEDICATION —

TO

The "SIX"

— LIBRARIANS ALL

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for the

CHARACTER, DIRECTION

and

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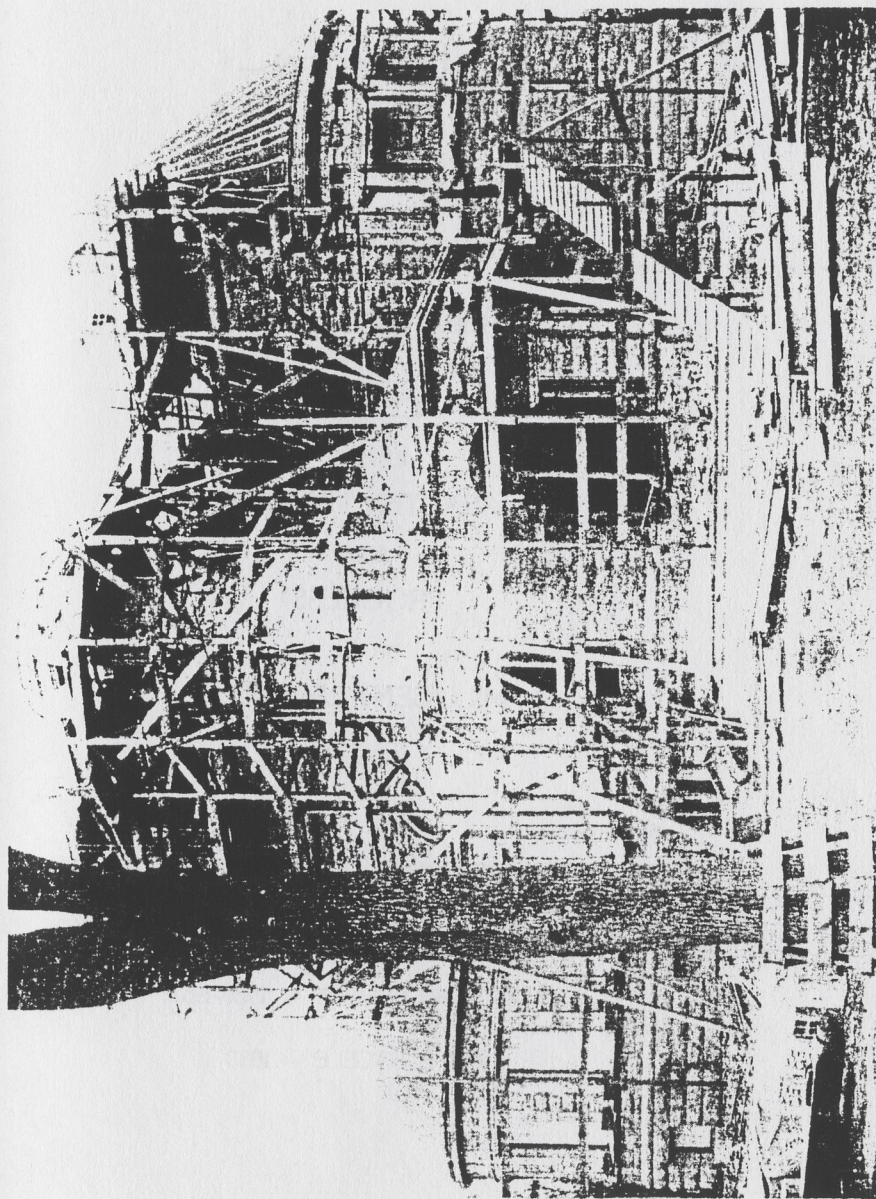
MILLICENT LIBRARY

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THE GIRL IN THE WINDOW

THE WINDOW

In the Millicent Library of Fairhaven, Massachusetts, there is a spectacular window of stained glass. It is sixteen feet in height and was crafted in 1891 in London by the firm of Clayton & Bell. Within one of its compartments is depicted in gem-like colors a likeness of the great Shakespeare. To right and left in encircling frames are the names of American poets, but the lower and outstanding pane shows a female form—the gentle muse of poetry herself in softly draped robes—her face, pure and lovely, raised in a sort of adoration. The spectator knows at once that this is a real face, the actual likeness of a flesh and blood maiden. The face is that of Millicent G. Rogers, in whose memory the window was mounted—and, indeed, the whole building was raised.

Young Millicent Rogers was the daughter of H.H. Rogers, oil tycoon, millionaire and generous benefactor in his home town of Fairhaven, Massachusetts. Millicent and her sisters and brother had been happy vacation and weekend habitues of the little town from birth, and with their parents, both of whom were themselves Fairhaven natives—had spent happy, care-free hours here among relatives and friends, in particular communion with both maternal and paternal grand-parents.

THE PLAN

When little Millie Rogers—who had dearly loved to sketch and read—died in 1890 at seventeen years old—her grieving family sought an appropriate means of memorializing her short life, and the plan to erect in Fairhaven a unique and lavish tribute to the arts was formed. There would be raised, in Millicent's name, a splendid, yet functional library.

— THE CORNER STONE

Land was purchased in the year of her death, and the corner stone was laid in September 1891 at six o'clock of a Monday morning. Only the family and a clergyman were in attendance at these morning ceremonies. Prayer was offered by the Rev. J.M. Leighton, and the little brother Master Harry Rogers, set the stone. Within its confines were a sketch of Millicent, a tracing of the Rogers' ancestry, and a copy of the FAIRHAVEN STAR carrying a picture of the proposed building.

Work upon the edifice commenced immediately with the auctioning of derelict building remaining on the chosen site which was confined by William, Walnut and Centre Streets. The old Fish and Bradford house at this location was sold to Mr D. W Deane, who paid \$132 for the east half, and \$142 for the west section. On June 6, 1891 ground was broken, and through the remaining months of 1891 and all of 1892, work on the memorial building progressed at amazing speed.

THE TOWNSPEOPLE

There could be little doubt that the Fairhaven citizenry experienced a certain amazement as they beheld, day by day, the ascending walls of their library—for intellectual services and pursuits in the village had become sadly thwarted. In 1890, the town was still economically depressed in the wake of a dying whaling industry. To be sure, there was an Improvement Association, a small and heroic town newspaper and one good grammar school, previously donated by Mr Rogers; but there existed few other means for stimulation of town and personal pride. Yet, as one reads of these stalwart Fairhavenites—when they speak out at town meetings, and write their literate letters to their newspaper—it becomes apparent that they were natively a people searching for the surety which knowledge can bring, and their town leaders, who believed in the efficacy of learning, tried very hard to keep alive this respect for culture.

THE LITERARY SOCIETY —

For instance, since 1878, the town had boasted a devoted literary society. Intellectual leaders—for the most part professional men—met weekly in local homes, and considered surprisingly erudite topics. The members read papers prepared in areas basic to their own careers.

Thus, the Rev. William Carruthers discussed:
“Supply and Demand in State and Church.”
Dr. C. C. Cundall dealt with:
“Medical Humbugs!”
George H. Tripp, New Bedford librarian, researched:
“History and Influence of the Drama.”
Dr E. M. Whitney contributed a treatise on:
“Mind Study.”

These papers and others like them, printed weekly in the town newspaper, are cogently written and extensively researched.

EARLY LIBRARY SERVICES —

The STAR comments that a New Bedford paper printed by Abraham Sherman assures us in issue of May 28, 1802—that Fairhaven had a library of sorts even at that early date. In an advertisement in this journal, Isaiah

Jones, Fairhaven librarian, exhorts all persons possessed of books belonging to said library “to return them at the annual meeting to be held at 1 P.M. on June 7th.”

Furthermore the FAIRHAVEN STAR, in historical review, tells us that on December 15, 1828: “Young Fairhaven ladies and gentleman met at the home of Levi Jenney for the purpose of forming themselves into an association of mutual instruction.” This group became known as the Fairhaven Lyceum, and was said to be the core unit of an active Fairhaven Library Association, organized in 1860 with Dr George Atwood as president.

On January 29, 1881, the STAR reports that the Fairhaven Library Association is considerably in debt—despite the fact that the running expenses are but \$60 to \$100 a year!

In March, 1881, we are told that the library is located in a room over a store on the corner of William and Main Streets—and that the quarters are inferior for the purposes required—there being much discontent because of the antics of obstreperous, noisy boys!

However in 1885, we are reassured that library rooms are now open over the Fairhaven Savings Bank, corner of Main and Centre Streets. New library hours have been instituted every afternoon from 2 to 5, and every evening from 6 to 8. Citizens are all urged to become members of the association. Stock holders will pay \$2 a year for membership; non-stock holders are to pay 1¢ a day for each volume borrowed.

This, then, was the state of cultural activity in Fairhaven in 1890 when the Rogers family planned a young girl's memorial—a memorial to the 17 year-old Millicent who had once said on a visit to Fairhaven: “I wish we had a good library!”



THE BUILDING

So on the chosen site, the memorial building—in the style of Italian Renaissance—rose steadily during those exciting years of 1891 1892, and the “side walk engineers” gathered in idle moments to watch incredible progress. Charles Brigham, foremost American architect of his day, from the Boston firm of Brigham & Spofford, was chosen to draw the plans. Norcross Brothers, the richest building firm in the country, was given orders to use the best of everything—no defaced or discolored materials to be tolerated; and there was to be particular emphasis on the artistic in every phase of planning. Arthur Robinson, expert painter and finisher of fine woods, had charge of all painting, rubbing and staining.

The basement segment of the walls was made of granite from Norcross Brothers' Branbury quarries; the remainder of the building was constructed of Dedham granite, rock faced. Ornamentation was effected by beautifully fashioned terra cotta wreaths and garlands in a luminous golden hue, while the roofs were tiled in deep red; and gutters, conductors, finials and ridge rolls were of copper.

Within the building, there were sheathing, doors and door casings of heavy oak, beautifully grained. Masterly carving of some of this magnificent wood was spectacular. Much of the inside wall area was finished in fine brick stencilled to a rich and intricate pattern. There were Perth Amboy fireplaces throughout, and opposite Millicent's window, the roof flared to a domed loftiness providing height for later adjustment of book galleries as need might demand.

The reading room to the right of the main entrance also swept to a dramatic dome broken by a semi-circular curve of lofty window apertures providing excellent natural lighting. Stained glass gleamed in panels over doorways, and a spectacular oriel window in the librarian's room shimmered in muted color.

ACCEPTANCE

On December 10, 1892, the memorial was finished, and large numbers of townspeople assembled in Phoenix Hall in special town meeting to see if the body would accept it from:

Annie E. Benjamin
Cara Rogers Duff
Mary Huttleston Rogers
and
Henry Huttleston Rogers Jr

It was a dramatic moment when H. H. Rogers Sr presented a deed of trust to the meeting, and the townspeople accepted with gratitude the lovely gift from a grieving family.

J. H. Howland, E. G. Paull and Mrs. Alfred Nye were appointed a town committee to place a memorial tablet in the new building. This bronze plaque was later affixed to the wall just over the vestibule doors.

DEDICATION

The library was dedicated on January 30, 1893 in two separate ceremonies. There was a private memorial service in the morning when the memorial window was unveiled. Public dedicatory exercises were held in the Congregational Church at 1:30 P.M. of the same day. The church was packed with friends listening to reverent music and to significant remarks by the Rev. Robert Collyer. Mr. George H. Tripp and by Millicent's father who spoke very simple words:

“The germ of the Millicent Library had its origin in the darkness of a great grief and pressed its tendrils into our hearts through a little story that was told us of the dear girl whose memory we adore and desire to perpetuate.

“The story was expressive of what was in her thoughts a few weeks before her death and coupled with the love she held for books, there came to our children a common desire to erect a library in tribute to her memory.

“If we have built better than was required by the measure of practical needs, it was because we were working to an ideal that we desired should stand for the best in worth and beauty.

“We have tried to give the library an individuality in harmony with the character and personality as we cherish them, of the loved one whose loss we mourn.”

— OPENING

On the afternoon and evening of Dedicatory Day, January 30, 1893, the anniversary of Millicent's birth, the first book was taken from the library by her grandmother, Mrs. Roland Rogers, mother of Henry; and between the hours of 9 and 10 on this same day—time was reserved at Mr. Rogers' request, for townspeople who were seventy years of age or over to avail themselves of the initial services of the library and to withdraw the first books.

ENDOWMENT PLANS

Upon completion of building, Mr. Rogers established a fund of \$100,000 as endowment for the new library. However in the year immediately following the opening, added expense was incurred in that a new tier of stacks had to be installed as repository for the thousands of

extra books which he was constantly adding to the inadequate initial stock. It became increasingly clear that the planned endowment fund would not be sufficient and an imaginative idea born of Mr Rogers' business acumen was to furnish a practical solution. He made the decision to link the library's financial needs to the destinies of the Fairhaven Water Company.

WATER COMPANY

The problem of supplying water to the homes and businesses of Fairhaven had rankled for many years. In 1857 a water system was talked about, but in those days, there were no artesian wells, and the only sources of water were rivers and ponds. An enterprising young Fairhaven engineer, Joseph F Nye, became very much interested in the project, when one day in 1885, he was listening to the "jawboning" in Levi Snow's drug store! Capt. Alexander Winsor doughty old salt, announced as he reluctantly rose to leave, that he "had to go home to pump a tank full of water!"

Young Joseph Nye became greatly thoughtful and determined that he had a mission to provide the town with a public water supply. With two young friends, he struggled to organize a Fairhaven Water Company. He planned to take the water from the Mill Pond and distribute it by the "Holly System." However a paucity of money and of popular influence, defeated every effort in his endeavor to obtain some town financing.

Quietly and strategically, Mr Rogers entered the fray, and backing young Nye's efforts with cold cash and first-rate investigative expertise, he dramatically changed the plans for better ones; at the same time, retaining the offices of the enthusiastic Nye as his agent. In 1892 and 1893, artesian wells were driven in the woods south of Nasketucket Mill Stream. By August 7 1893, 105 Italians were digging trenches for street pipes, and a stand-pipe was being erected on Washington Street. Thus, in 1893, the Fairhaven Water Company was organized for the purpose of supplying the town, and perhaps Mattapoisett, with conduit water Mr Rogers was now the sole owner of the company; but for purposes of incorporation, there were small holdings in the names of others. The plant, at time of founding, was one of the finest for a small town in this section of the country.

Now, Mr Rogers proposed to finance his cherished library by giving all shares in the Fairhaven Water Company to the trustees of the Millicent Library as a sustaining fund for the beautiful building. The gift represented an investment of about \$125,000 which would afford the library \$5,000 a year

For more than fifty years, the plan worked smoothly, and the library was totally maintained by the two endowment funds with no financial drain upon town taxes—and no incursions of politics into library affairs. It was not until 1948, when the town had grown to four times its early size, with depression and inflation sapping its resources, that the library's financial condition became critical. Stop-gap town appropriations had to be requested until 1968, when the town, through legislative petition, was mandated to take over the properties of the Fairhaven Water Company, and to assume responsibility for a major part of the library's financing.

— MAINTENANCE —

Maintenance of the building throughout the years has been efficient and tasteful. In 1951 a Providence mural artist, George de Felice, redecorated the interior with admirable expertise. Handsome gifts of statuary, painting, framed historical documents, furnishings, and splendid rugs have made the Millicent Library a charming retreat for reading, research and introspection. Townspeople have been proud of it and happy within it. The young have studied there, and children have enjoyed their own youth area. Yet, there came the day when space resources were inadequate—and a major effort had to be made to deal with an expanding town population desirous of library services.

THE ADDITION

Over a period of seven years, plans were advanced, and financial means were explored to bring to dedication in 1968 a splendid addition to the old structure. Financed by federal and town grants—augmented by handsome financial and artistic support from Mr Rogers' descendants and from other friends—the new addition duplicates amazingly the materials, plans and decoration of the older structure. Architects were Tallman, Drake and Guay of New Bedford, and builders were the Loranger Construction Corporation. Interior decorating was by Ruth Atkinson and landscaping by Marinus Vander Pol.

The addition met manifold needs. The children's room was enlarged; a staff work room was made possible; a bookmobile garage and adjacent bookroom were added, and the spacious "Rita E. Steele Auditorium" has provided a pleasant place for scores of town activities.

Central to the expanded area is the "Rogers Room" planned to house the Rogers memorabilia and to introduce in lighted cases ever-varying displays of popular interest. This is a rich and beautiful place panelled in African walnut with a matching parquet floor: comfortably furnished and air-conditioned to encourage warm-weather study.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Millicent Library has functioned since inception under the direction of a board of trustees serving for life unless removal from town, voluntary resignation or incapacity to function have interrupted tenure. Henry H. Rogers was the first president of the board, and since his death, there has always been at least one member of the Rogers family in service as trustee. After the water company surrendered stock to the town in 1968—four trustees were appointed by the Board of Selectmen. A fifth trustee is the current chairman of this town board. The spacious “trustee’s room,” later renamed in recognition of Charles J. Lewin, was for years the traditional meeting place for the group which currently conducts business in the Rogers Room.

SERVICES

The resources of the Millicent Library both material and inspirational, are available to all those who desire them. Without delineating the many functions generally assumed by a town library, it is clear that—over the years—librarians, staff members and trustees have taken very seriously the words of the donor at presentation exercises when he said:

“The future will reveal the good of the library, the purpose of which is to promote education and good fellowship. We want it used. We want every man, woman and child, who is entitled to its privileges to feel that it is in part his own property.

“It is our hope that all will be interested to give the largest possible circulation to the books, that the rooms will be freely used by the people, and that there will never be permitted to grow the feeling that it is intended for the few rather than for the many.

“I am sure that the trustees who have been selected, as you must have observed, for local reasons, as well as for their characters and intelligence have caught the spirit of our desires, and will conduct the library in the broadest manner, for the benefit of our entire community, including as well the ‘stranger within our gates, and such of our neighbors at the north, east and west of us as may compliment us by drawing on the good things that will be offered.”

BOOKMOBILE

Services were enormously extended with the presentation to the library in 1956 of a bookmobile. The gift of Mrs. Philip E. Young, it made possible the closing of costly extension library facilities, and brought the pleasures of reading closer to all town residents. The bookmobile has been

kept in good condition by further grants from Mrs. Young, and tours the town three or four days a week throughout the year carrying duplicates of volumes to be found on the main library shelves.

THE FAMILY

Since that day in 1893—when the four children of H. H. Rogers offered to the town of Fairhaven—a lovely library in their dead sister’s memory, there has existed a very special and continuing interest in this memorial on the part of Rogers family members.

Sons and daughters, grand-children and great grand-children of Millicent’s sisters and brother together with their husbands and wives, have thought of us—have come to this place and have been sensitive to the old family warmth and unity which the “Millicent legend” represents. There have come the Rogers; the Benjamins; the Broughtons; the Coes; the Peralta-Ramoses.

By their friendship and their generosity, over the years, they have continued to enrich the library together with the lives of Fairhaven people who use it—and the beautiful “Rogers Room” has been at last built as final repository for those records and artifacts delineating the worth and character of their family.

So—in a very warm and special way, the “girl in the window” has indeed been memorialized!



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